

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF WEST VIRGINIA**

**JONATHAN OJEDA,**

**Plaintiff,**

**v.**

**Civil Action No. 2:10cv126  
(Judge Bailey)**

**DR. PROCTER, TRISTEN TENNY,  
ADRIAN HOKE AND WEXFORD  
MEDICAL SOURCES,**

**Defendants.**

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

The *pro se* plaintiff initiated this case on November 8, 2010, by filing a civil rights complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. On November 15th, he was granted permission to proceed as a pauper and assessed an initial partial filing fee. The plaintiff paid his initial partial filing fee on December 3, 2010. This case is before the undersigned for an initial review and report and recommendation pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e) and 1915A and LR PL P 2.

**I. The Complaint**

In the complaint, the plaintiff asserts that the defendants have denied him adequate and appropriate medical care in violation of the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. More specifically, the plaintiff asserts that he suffers from back problems<sup>1</sup> and Osteoporosis, and that the defendants have failed to provide him the appropriate medications and

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<sup>1</sup>The plaintiff asserts that he has had three major back surgeries on his lower back, that he has bulging discs between his 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> vertebrae, disintegrating discs in his entire spine and disc problems in his neck and shoulder. Complaint at 4.

other treatment to alleviate his pain and to prevent further injury. He further asserts that the defendants have refused to see him for scheduled medical appointments, failed to properly diagnose the extent of his medical condition and failed to arrange outside consultations, surgeries and/or physical therapy. The plaintiff asserts that he filed administrative remedies but that they were all denied.

As to the specific defendants, the plaintiff asserts that Dr. Procter and Tristen Tenny, as medical personnel, have failed to provide him adequate medical care. He then asserts that Adrian Hoke, as Warden of the Huttonsville Correctional Center, failed to overturn his denied grievances. Finally, the plaintiff asserts that Wexford Health Sources is liable for his injuries as it failed to properly train and instruct its employees in proper patient care.

## **II. Standard of Review**

Because the plaintiff is a prisoner seeking redress from a governmental entity or employee, the Court must review the amended complaint to determine whether it is frivolous or malicious. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b), the Court is required to perform a judicial review of certain suits brought by prisoners and must dismiss a case at any time if the Court determines that the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.

A complaint is frivolous if it is without arguable merit either in law or in fact. Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). However, the Court must read *pro se* allegations in a liberal fashion. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972). A complaint which fails to state a claim under Fed.R.Civ.P. 12(b)(6) is not automatically frivolous. See Neitzke at 328. Frivolity dismissals

should only be ordered when the legal theories are “indisputably meritless,”<sup>2</sup> or when the claims rely on factual allegations which are “clearly baseless.” Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 32 (1992). This includes claims in which the plaintiff has little or no chance of success. See Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976).

### **III. Analysis**

At the outset, it is important to underscore that “however inartfully pleaded, [a *pro se* document] must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers . . . .” Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976)(internal quotations omitted).

#### **A. Wexford Health Sources**

Title 42 U.S.C. § 1983 provides that:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia.

Thus, in order to state a successful claim under § 1983, the plaintiff must demonstrate that a person acting under color of state law deprived him of a right guaranteed by the Constitution or federal laws. Rendall-Baker v. Kohn, 457 U.S. 830, 838 (1982).

Here, the plaintiff cannot establish that Wexford Health Sources is a “person” for purposes

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<sup>2</sup>Id. at 327.

of § 1983. Brooks v. Pembroke City Jail, 722 F.Supp. 1294, 1301 (E.D.N.C.1989) (“Claims under § 1983 are directed at ‘persons’ and the jail is not a person amenable to suit.”); see also Will v. Michigan Dept. Of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989) (“Neither a State nor its officials acting in their official capacities are ‘persons’ under § 1983”); Preval v. Reno, 203 F.3d 821 (4th Cir. 2000)(unpublished) (“[T]he Piedmont Regional Jail is not a ‘person,’ and therefore not amenable to suit under §42 U.S.C. 1983”); Roach v. Burch, 825 F. Supp. 116 (N.D.W.Va. 1993) (The West Virginia Regional Jail Authority is “in effect the State of West Virginia” and is not a person under § 1983). Therefore, like a jail, Wexford Medical Sources is not amenable to suit under § 1983 and should be dismissed as a defendant in this action.

**B. Defendant Adrian Hoke**

Liability under § 1983 is “personal, based upon each defendant’s own constitutional violations.” Trulock v. Freeh, 275 F.3d 391, 402 (4th Cir.2001)(internal citation omitted). Therefore, in order to establish liability under § 1983, the plaintiff must specify the acts taken by each defendant which violate his constitutional rights. See Wright v. Smith, 21 F.3d 496, 501 (2d Cir. 1994); Colburn v. Upper Darby Township, 838 F.2d 663, 666 (3<sup>rd</sup> Cir. 1988). Some sort of personal involvement on the part of the defendant and a causal connection to the harm alleged must be shown. See Zatler v. Wainwright, 802 F.2d 397, 401 (11<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1986). *Respondeat superior* cannot form the basis of a claim for a violation of a constitutional right in a Bivens case. Rizzo v. Good, 423 U.S. 362 (1976).

In this case, the plaintiff does not assert that defendant Hoke participated in his medical care in any way. Instead, he merely asserts that defendant Hoke should have overturned his denied grievances. It is well-established, however, that this is not the type of personal involvement

required to state a claim of deliberate indifference. See Paige v. Kupec, 2003 WL 23274357 \*1 (D.Md. March 31, 2003) (a defendant is not deliberately indifferent to his serious medical needs by denying administrative grievances, or by failing to respond to such grievances). At best then, the plaintiff names Warden Hoke in his official or supervisory capacity as the Warden of the Huttonsville Correctional Center. However, official capacity claims “generally represent only another way of pleading an action against an entity of which an officer is an agent.” Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159, 165 (1985) (citation and quotations omitted). Therefore, suits against state officials in their official capacities should be treated as suits against the state. *Id.* at 166. In order for the governmental entity to be a proper party of interest, the entity’s policy or custom must have played a part in the violation. *Id.* (citing Monell v. New York City Dept. of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978)). In this case, the plaintiff fails to assert that a policy or custom of the entity played a part in the alleged violation of his constitutional rights.

As to supervisory capacity, as previously noted, there is no *respondeat superior* liability under § 1983. See Monell v. Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658 (1978); Vinnedge v. Gibbs, 550 F. 2d 926, 928 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1997). Instead, “liability will lie where it is affirmatively shown that the official charged acted personally in the deprivation of the plaintiff’s rights.” Vinnedge, supra. When a supervisor is not personally involved in the alleged wrongdoing, he may be liable under §1983 if a subordinate acts pursuant to an official policy or custom for which he is responsible. Fisher v. Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, 690 F. 2d 1113 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1982). Similarly, a supervisor may be liable under § 1983 if the following elements are established: “(1) the supervisor had actual or constructive knowledge that his subordinate was engaged in conduct that posed a ‘pervasive and unreasonable risk’ of constitutional injury to citizens like the

plaintiff; (2) the supervisor's response to that knowledge was so inadequate as to show 'deliberate indifference to or tacit authorization of the alleged offensive practices,' and (3) there was an 'affirmative causal link' between the supervisor's inaction and the particular constitutional injury suffered by the plaintiff." Shaw v. Stroud, 13 F.3d 791, 799 (4th Cir.), cert. denied, 513 U.S. 813 (1994).<sup>3</sup>

In this instance, the plaintiff fails to make any allegations which reveal the presence of the required elements for supervisory liability. Consequently, the plaintiff fails to state a claim against Warden Hoke and he cannot maintain this action against him.

### **C. Dr. Procter and Tristan Tenney**

To state a claim under the Eighth Amendment for ineffective medical assistance, the plaintiff must show that the defendant acted with deliberate indifference to his serious medical needs. Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 104 (1976). To succeed on an Eighth Amendment cruel and unusual punishment claim, a prisoner must prove: (1) that objectively the deprivation of a basic human need was "sufficiently serious," and (2) that subjectively the prison official acted with a "sufficiently culpable state of mind." Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294, 298 (1991).

A serious medical condition is one that has been diagnosed by a physician as mandating treatment or that is so obvious that even a lay person would recognize the need for a doctor's attention. Gaudreault v. Municipality of Salem, Mass., 923 F.2d 203, 208 (1<sup>st</sup> Cir. 1990), cert.

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<sup>3</sup>"Establishing a 'pervasive' and 'unreasonable' risk of harm requires evidence that the conduct is widespread, or at least has been used on several different occasions and that the conduct engaged in by the subordinate poses an unreasonable risk of harm or constitutional injury." Shaw, 13 F.3d at 799. "A plaintiff may establish deliberate indifference by demonstrating a supervisor's 'continued inaction in the face of documented widespread abuses.'" *Id.*

denied, 500 U.S. 956 (1991). A medical condition is also serious if a delay in treatment causes a life-long handicap or permanent loss. Monmouth County Corr. Inst. Inmates v. Lanzaro, 834 F.2d 326, 347 (3<sup>rd</sup> Cir. 1987), cert. denied, 486 U.S. 1006 (1988).

The subjective component of a cruel and unusual punishment claim is satisfied by showing that the prison official acted with deliberate indifference. Wilson, 501 U.S. at 303. A finding of deliberate indifference requires more than a showing of negligence. Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 835 (1994). A prison official “must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference.” Id. at 837. A prison official is not liable if he “knew the underlying facts but believed (albeit unsoundly) that the risk to which the fact gave rise was insubstantial or nonexistent.” Id. at 844.

“To establish that a health care provider’s actions constitute deliberate indifference to a serious medical need, the treatment, [or lack thereof], must be so grossly incompetent, inadequate, or excessive as to shock the conscience or to be intolerable to fundamental fairness.” Miltier v. Beorn, 896 F.2d 848, 851 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1990). A mere disagreement between the inmate and the prison’s medical staff as to the inmate’s diagnosis or course of treatment does not support a claim of cruel and unusual punishment unless exceptional circumstances exist. Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841, 849 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1985). A constitutional violation is established when “government officials show deliberate indifference to those medical needs which have been diagnosed as mandating treatment, conditions which obviously require medical attention, conditions which significantly affect an individual’s daily life activities, or conditions which cause pain, discomfort or a threat to good health.” See Morales Feliciano v. Calderon Serra, 300 F.Supp.2d 321, 341 (D.P.R. 2004) (citing Brock v. Wright, 315 F.3d 158, 162 (2d Cir. 2003)).

Upon due consideration of the claims alleged in the complaint, the undersigned is of the opinion that the plaintiff's claims against defendant Procter and Tenney should not be summarily dismissed at this time. Instead, the undersigned believes that those defendants should be made to answer the complaint.

#### **IV. Recommendation**

For the reasons stated, the undersigned recommends that:

(1) the plaintiff's claims against Wexford Health Services and Adrian Hoke be **DISMISSED with prejudice** pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A and 1915(e) for the failure to state a claim for which relief may be granted; and

(2) the plaintiff's claims against defendants Dr. Procter and Tristan Tenney **PROCEED** and that those defendants be **SERVED** with a copy of a twenty-one (21) day summons and the complaint through the United States Marshal Service.

Within **fourteen (14) days** after being served with a copy of this Opinion/Report and Recommendation, any party may file with the Clerk of Court written objections identifying those portions of the recommendation to which objection is made and the basis for such objections. A copy of any objections shall also be submitted to the Honorable John Preston Bailey, United States District Judge. Failure to timely file objections to this recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of this Court based upon such recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984), cert. denied, 467 U.S. 1208 (1984).

The Clerk is directed to send a copy of this Opinion/Report and Recommendation to the *pro*



se petitioner by certified mail, return receipt requested to his last known address as shown on the docket.

DATED: December 7, 2010.

  
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**DAVID J. JOEL**  
**UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE**